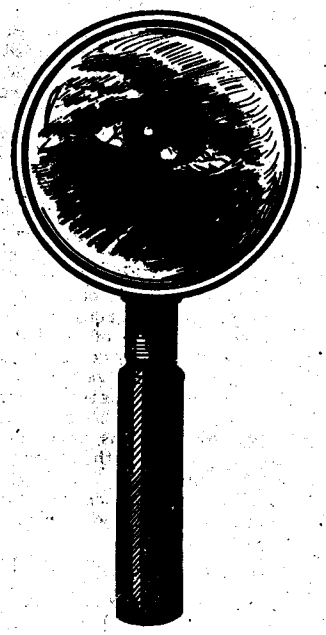
Jack Anderson

Post 11/9/75

Demoralization and Deterioration Inside the CIA



By Dennis Hermanson for The Washington Post

There is another side to the CIA story that hasn't been told. It's a story of demoralization and deterioration inside the clandestine agency. It's the reason William Colby was finally fired as the CIA chief.

We believe that excessive secrecy produced an unwholesome environment, which was changing the CIA into an ugly, frightening creature. "For too long," we recently wrote, "the CIA has operated in a subterranean world of half light, a world of grotesque shapes and shadows."

This was turning the CIA, we suggested, into an unfamiliar, un-American agency, which plotted murders, committed burglaries, conducted buggings, blackmailed diplomats, tailed newsmen and spied on loyal Americans.

Our CIA contacts have given us another picture, which we feel obligated to publish. We felt sunlight was the best antidote for the rot that was infecting the CIA. They claim there has been too much sunlight which, as one CIA source put it, "has left us naked before our enemies."

Here are some of the repercussions, which we have been able to confirm:

—Top CIA informants and contract employees are switching their allegiances to foreign intelligence services, which they consider more trustworthy.

—The Soviet defectors, whom the CIA has been able to coax over to the American side, no longer trust the agency. This could shut off invaluable future sources of information.

—The spectacle of the CIA confessing its sins to Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, has left sophisticated allied intelligence officials incredulous. One of them commented: "You don't have a country, you have a church—no pun intended."

—This has reduced the CIA's credibility with allied intelligence agencies. "Oh, they have to deal with us," one source acknowledged, "but the extent of the cooperation is less because of their lessened confidence in us."

—The Middle Eastern intelligence services simply can't understand how the CIA could be induced to turn over to Rep. Otis Pike, D-N.Y., the most secret material on the Cyprus crisis and related Middle East problems.

—In Portugal, where a Communist coup is still a threat, the CIA normally would have given clandestine support to moderate leaders at least commensurate with what the Soviets are doing. Instead, it has been left largely to Britain, France, Italy and West Germany to save Portugal.

—In Italy, Communists have taken over at least 17 major jurisdictions during recent elections. In times past, the CIA would have worked with Italian security men to prevent the victories, just as the Soviets poured money into the campaigns to elect the Communists.

—In Spain, the Soviets are more active than at any time since the Spanish civil war. They are strengthening the Communist remnants throughout the country. In contrast, the CIA has been outmanned, their morale broken.

—In Lebanon, the Soviet-supported Palestine Liberation Organization is gaining power. Once the CIA operated one of its strongest networks in Lebanon. Now its efforts are feeble.

—In Israel, the long ties between the CIA and the crack Israeli intelligence service have been badly strained.

—In France, the veteran No. 2 man in the intelligence services, a staunch friend of the CIA, has been replaced by a political appointee. Our sources blame this upon the decline of the CIA.

—In Australia, the devotedly pro-American intelligence chief has been ousted under similar, dismal circumstances.

Even in Canada, the old relationship between the CIA and the intelligence arm of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police has become corroded.

"All of them (are beginning to) mistrust us," explained a CIA contact. "They looked to us for leadership. Because they are out on the firing line, they must know that our word is trustworthy. But who will trust us with their country's secrets now?"

"You don't write up contracts in this business. The dealings of one agent with another becomes a sort of unofficial contract with the U.S. government."

CIA agents look upon themselves as patriots. Even in time of peace, they put their lives on the line for their country. Declared one CIA man with long experience: "No one in this business would work with all that self-sacrifice if he didn't think he was part of the secret arm of our government. Every CIA agent feels that he is an instrumentality of the President, no matter which President is in power."

Most of the veterans blame William Colby, the embattled CIA chief, for failing to stand up for them. He began to appear to them as a cold, calculating man who preferred exposure to loyalty, the sine qua non of all covert activity.

His predecessor, Richard Helms, was a dapper backroom operator, wise in the ways of the Georgetown sophisticates. If the CIA encountered any obstacles, he would explain the CIA's position in the musty, rich reading rooms of the Cosmos Club, Metropolitan Club and other haunts where the establishment figures hang out.

But Colby didn't operate in this clubby way. Instead, he submitted a 50-page summary to President Ford. As one CIA insider sees it, this "led the President to make an uninformed statement about how he was not going to 'tolerate' this kind of activity, which seemed to confirm everything the rumors were saying.

"This left a vacuum in the public understanding, and the legislative branch rushed in to fill it. The intelligence committees were set up with no resistance from Colby or anyone else. Colby was rushed up to Capitol Hill and shoveled over documents he should never have given to anyone. We estimate that at some time during this period, he has spent no more than five per cent of his time running the CIA."

Meanwhile, the CIA began hemorrhaging. Top agents and technicians began rushing to retire. The demoralization spread until the word reached the President. He reacted by firing Colby.

(c) 1975, by United Feature Syndicate